

PREFACE

This number of *Per Linguam* spans the entire spectrum of formal education, from pre-school to PhD level. As can be expected, we start with the pre-school phase, where **Loopoo and Balfour** investigate how Grade R teachers assess and teach reading. Using a mixed methods approach, the study investigates the strategies that teachers claim to be using to teach and assess reading. The article concludes that teachers expect too little from learners and as such are partly responsible for weak reading results. Staying at Foundation Phase level, **Le Roux and Stander** focus on the strategies that should be used for early interventions to foster the language development of hearing parents' deaf children. They show that even a relatively small intervention had a beneficial effect on the deaf learners' ability to use South African Sign Language (SASL). The study recommends that teachers be trained to use SASL so that deaf children's language and cognitive development can be on par with that of their hearing peers.

In the next article, which links up with Loopoo and Balfour's topic, **Hugo** investigates the teaching of reading, but now at Intermediate Phase level. She surveyed primary school teachers across three provinces in South Africa to determine their knowledge of six strategies to teach reading. Despite the fact that Intermediate Phase teachers receive learners from the Foundation Phase where they were taught in their home languages, the teachers do not implement the bilingual method. This method must surely be indispensable for learners who move from home language instruction to English in the Intermediate Phase. In addition, Hugo finds that teachers need to be more versatile when choosing methods to suit the varying needs of their learners. Still at Intermediate Phase level, **Moonsamy and Barnes** demonstrate the value of group discussions to mediate writing tasks for learners with developmental language difficulties. Using a quasi-experimental study that employed a pre- and posttest design, they could show how learners improve. Learners wrote a personal narrative, followed by discussions with the teacher after which they wrote a second personal narrative. Using a narrative ratings framework, Moonsamy and Barnes could show significance in the improvements of microstructure narrative writing skills but not of macrostructure narrative writing skills, although the mean scores indicated positive changes.

Still in the Intermediate Phase, **Ntsala** investigates one of the most problematic issues in South African government schools, which is overcrowded classrooms and their effect on assessment. With a focus on various assessment strategies (for example group assessments, informal assessments), Ntsala argues that the degree to which the teacher is willing to adapt and to be versatile in their assessment methods are crucial to mitigate the challenges of overcrowding in English language teaching classrooms.

Moving on to the English language teaching at secondary school and the development of oral proficiency, **Vukosi, Smith, Rautenbach and Collins** compare learner performance in former model-C public schools in Soshanguve and private schools in the CBD of Tshwane. Although oral proficiency assessment is notoriously subjective, they find marked differences in learner achievement. They also find that learners at former model-C schools as well as private schools report anxiety when they have to do unprepared speeches.

At undergraduate level, **Mbirimi-Hungwe** also looks at assessment, but from a translanguaging perspective. The author investigates the performance of first-year medical students to determine the effect of using other languages when dealing with complex academic materials. The conclusion is that unrealistic expectations of English language proficiency (a kind of *native speakerism*) have a negative impact on student performance and that lecturers should focus on students' understanding rather than their command of English.

It is not often that *Per Linguam* publishes articles on language use at PhD level. However, this very important topic is tackled in the article by **Leshem and Bitzer**. Their analyses of eight doctoral theses show how PhD candidates communicate the 'story' of their research. The authors focus on signposting in theses as a way to make the writing more reader-friendly. They argue that it is imperative for supervisors to draw doctoral candidates' attention to aspects of readability to improve their chances of communicating their research successfully to the examiners.

I hope this number of the journal will offer something for all the diverse interests of our readership.

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